

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE

March, 11, 2011

S.B. 529 To establish a pilot program for the provision of autism spectrum disorder services to adults in New London County

Thank you members of the Public Health Committee for giving me the opportunity to be heard today. My name is Kristen Anbari. I have four year old twins, one of whom has autism. I, like so many, moved to southeastern CT with my husband for quality of life, hoping to start a family in a picturesque small town. We checked crime rates, employment rates, school systems, before choosing where to live. We didn't think at that time we would be looking into autism programs as well. After my son's diagnosis, we found that southeastern CT is very poorly served in terms of autism specific services. I find myself working hard every day to get my son the services and treatments he needs. We travel to Yale on a regular basis for evaluations. We travel to Glastonbury every week for a feeding clinic. Our family and many other families in southeastern CT spend many wasted hours driving our children with autism to get services in other areas of the state or in RI. With gas prices on a continuous rise, traveling for services is not an option for many people.

I have given up my career and have devoted my life to help my son. I am doing everything I can so that my son can grow and be an independent productive member of society without relying on any governmental support. I have created a website (www.arsect.com) to help parents like me find autism specific resources in southeastern CT. I am working with a number of very energetic and compassionate people on a volunteer basis to build this network of providers for my son and other people with autism, and we all need your support and partnership to achieve this.

I believe bringing this pilot program to southeastern CT is only the beginning of something bigger. We are in dire need for better services for adults with autism. It will help enhance their lives, teach them the skills to survive in this society and give them the emotional and educational support to navigate through life. Too many adults with autism end up homeless, in the judicial system, or at home playing video games when services abruptly end when they reach adulthood. The CDC puts autism prevalence at 1 in 110 American children and 1 in 70 boys. That is a 57% increase from 2002 to 2006 and a 600% increase in 20 years. If we could teach this special population to live up to their potential and become productive members of society now, they will be less of a burden financially on their communities and the state of Connecticut overall.

I am hoping by bringing this pilot program to southeastern CT, some day it will apply and help my son and other children and adults affected with autism. You would think this bill does not directly affect my son, but it does. And it will. My son's story is one of hundreds of stories you can hear on a daily basis from mothers in southeastern CT.

I, and hundreds of other parents of children with autism, spend all of our days and nights to take care of our children. We sleep very poorly because our children wake up several times a night, we follow extremely regimented schedules to avoid getting our children confused or upset. We spend many hours in our cars to shuttle our kids to receive services. The rate of autism is rising exponentially, and it will not be long before this condition affects every family in America. Worst of all, we have no cure for autism and my child and hundreds of other children will be growing up and needing far more financial resources than they do now. By bringing this pilot program to southeastern CT, we can save the state of CT a substantial amount of money and will take care of the needs of this very special population.

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony.

Kristen D Anbari